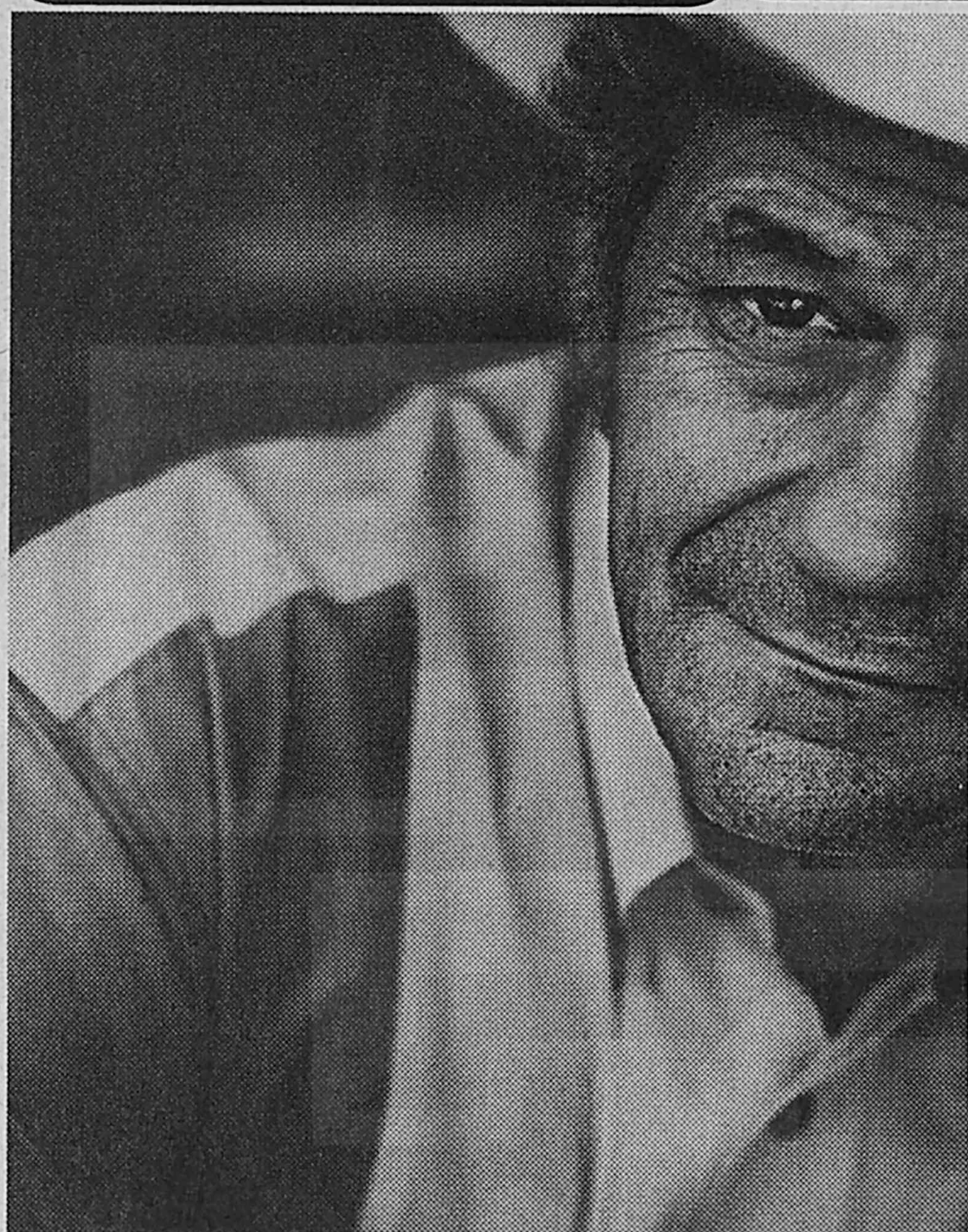


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#158

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REVIEWS

(or not)

**BILLY
BRATCHER**

•

**CAROLINE
& THE
RAMBLERS**

•

IRIS DeMENT

•

LEYLA FENCES

•

**LIAM
FITZGERALD
& THE
RAINIEROS**

•

ROSIE FLORES

•

**HENRY
HORENSTEIN**

•

**TIM O'BRIEN
& DARRELL
SCOTT**

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- 2 **Corb Lund: Cabin Fever** (New West) *PT/*TA/*TL
- 3 **Liam Fitzgerald & The Rainieros: Last Call!** (self) *AG/*LMG/*SH
- 4 **Jimmy LaFave: Depending On The Distance** (Music Road)
*AA/*GN/*RF
- 5 **John Hiatt: Mystic Pinball** (New West) *AH/*JB
- 6 **The Time Jumpers** (Rounder) *KR/*KW/*LB
- 7 **Dwight Yoakam: 3 Pears** (Warner Brothers) *JT/*JZ
- 8 **Stan Martin: Distilled Influences** (Twangtone) *BR/*DG/*DWB
- 9 **Leyla Fences: Itty Bitty Twang Twang** (self) *TR
- 10 **James Hand: Mighty Lonesome Man** (Hillgrass Bluebilly)
*ATC/*RA/*ST
- 11 **The Flatlanders: The Odessa Files** (New West) *EE/*PP
- 12 **Patterson Hood: Heat Lightning Rumbles In The Distance**
(ATO) *BB
- 13= **Lucy Kaplansky: Reunion** (Red House) *MF
- Chris Knight: Little Victories** (Drifter's Church) *RV
- 14 **Tim O'Brien & Darrell Scott: We're Usually A Lot Better Than This**
(Full Light) *BP/*OO
- 15 **Ry Cooder: Election Special** (Nonesuch) *DJ/*JW
- 16 **Malcolm Holcombe: Down The River** (Gypsyeyes) *AM/*MB
- 17 **Bob Dylan: Tempest** (Columbia) *GM/*RL
- 18 **Caroline Herring: Camilla** (Signature Sounds) *CJ
- 19 **Ronny Elliott: I've Been Meaning To Write** (Blue Heart) *RC
- 20= **Kasey Chambers & Shane Nicholson: Wreck And Ruin**
(Sugar Hill) *BS

The Coal Porters: Find The One (Prima) *DA

Iris DeMent: Sing The Delta (Flariella)

John Wort Hannam: Brambles And Thorns (Borealis)

Shoebox Letters: Nowadays (self)

- 21= **Kathy Mattea: Calling Me Home** (Sugar Hill)
- Zoe Muth & The Lost High Rollers: Old Gold** (Signature Sounds)

- 22= **AJ Downing: Good Day** (Charkansas)

Hans Theessink & Terry Evans: Delta Time (Rapid Gator) *LH

VA: Even More Songs Of Route 66; From Here To There

(Lazy SoB)

- 23= **Birds Of Chicago** (self) *GF

The Old Crow Medicine Show, Carry Me Back (ATO)

The Stone Coyotes: A Wild Bird Flying (Red Cat) *CTS

Jerry Jeff Walker: Live From Austin, TX (May 6) *DS

HENRY HORENSTEIN

HONKY TONK; PORTRAITS OF COUNTRY MUSIC

(Norton, hardback ****)

Unto you this day I bring glad tidings for the upcoming holiday season—I may have a cure for your present buying headaches. I'm repeating myself here, from my 2003 cover story on the paperback edition, with the added proviso of assuming there are people on your list who rate a \$50 gift. Books can be as iffy as albums but the great thing about those that rely heavily on photographs is that you don't have to know anything about the subject matter, you can tell a kickass visual just by looking at it. For much of the 70s and early 80s, Horenstein, the Dorothea Lang of country music, shot album covers for Rounder and some posed and arranged shots are among the more than 120 (up from 100 in the original version) pictures in this retrospective of the period, but the ones that make the book so compelling were taken when he was off Rounder's clock. There are stars here, a rather motley collection that includes Mother Maybelle Carter, Jerry Lee Lewis, Dewey Balfa, Porter Wagoner, Nathan Abshire, Tex Ritter, DeFord Bailey, Dolly Parton, Ralph Stanley, and so on, but Horenstein was fascinated by the backstage, house bands, patrons, people waiting in line at the Ryman, tour buses and habitués of Tootsie's Orchid Lounge on Nashville's Lower Broadway (in fact, he told me, "I could have done a whole book just on Tootsie's, there's so much more, but I had to make choices"). Some of the added material was taken in the 90s, a few during the last couple of years, in Nashville and Austin, though I wish I'd been able to steer him in the direction of Giddy Ups or Ginny's, rather more his visual style than The Continental Club or The Broken Spoke. Horenstein told me he doesn't photograph musicians much anymore because "everybody wants to control images and limit access," so there's a rather wonderful irony in Garth Brooks being represented by a cardboard cutout at Fan Fair. Horenstein will be in Austin for the Texas Book Festival, with an exhibition at Grayduck Gallery, October 26th-28th.

JC

TIM O'BRIEN & DARRELL SCOTT

WE'RE USUALLY A LOT BETTER THAN THIS

(Full Light ****)

Question one might ask Scott about these 13 tracks, recorded at two benefit shows he and O'Brien did for their sons' junior high school, in 2005 and 2006, is why? The Grey Eagle, Asheville, NC, has a good reputation as a venue (*Yelp* is equivocal about the staff), but what I'd imagine were two fairly low pressure Sunday afternoons didn't really seem to call for setting up recording gear. However, Scott says, "I thought, 'why not record?'" which, if nothing else, shows he has very finely honed instincts. The 13 tracks include songs the two men have performed together hundreds of times and some Scott claims they were playing for the first time ever, and while Hank Williams' *House Of Gold*, Darrell & Wayne Scott's *With A Memory Like Mine* and an arrangement of *Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning*, which were on their collaborative album *Real Time* (Full Light, 2005), likely fall into the former class, the spontaneous cuts, which may (or may not) include Townes Van Zandt's *White Freightliner Blues* (bizarrely credited to Townes and his son Will), Gordon Lightfoot's *Early Morning Rain*, Keith Whitley's *You Don't Have To Move That Mountain* or Lefty Frizzell's *Mom And Dad's Waltz*, hardly sound improvised, the two men mesh together so well. In fact, sometimes it's hard to believe there are only two of them. The title comes from O'Brien's remark introducing *Mick Ryan's Lament*, and if you happen to be a musician, it should make your blood run cold. You mean this is what they sound like on an off-day, when they think they're not on top of their game? Oh, shit. This is not my usual cup of musical tea, but goddamn, these guys can play, sing and harmonize with so much musicianship and energy they ought to make believers out of anyone.

JC



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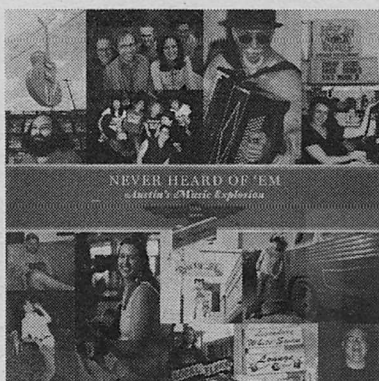
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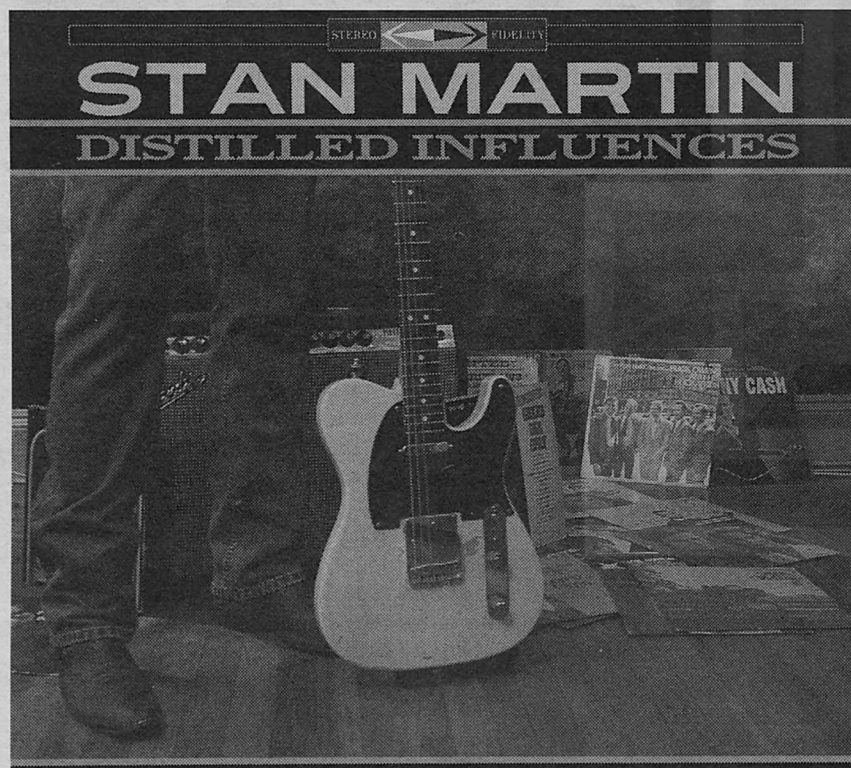
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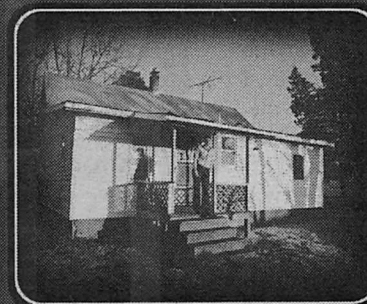
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IRIS DeMENT • Sing The Delta

(FlariElla *****)

Sometime in the early 90s, before **Infamous Angel** (Philo, 1992) sent the world, or at least my small corner of it, into a collective swoon, Austin publicist Cash Edwards was twisting arms to get people to show up at one or more of several local pop-up shows she'd organized for Iris DeMent. One was, of course, duly impressed and expected great things of her. However, over the next 20 years, she spiraled downwards, **My Life** (Warner Bros, 1993) generating less enthusiasm, **Words & Music** (Warner Bros, 1994) being almost totally ignored, and **The Way I Should** (Warner Bros, 1996) gaining some attention mainly because of puzzling and pointless guest appearances by Mark Knopfler, Lonnie Mack and Delbert McClinton. Then there was an eight year silence before the self-released **Lifeline** (FlariElla, 2004), a collection of Protestant hymns. Finally, she's back with original material and boy howdy has she stocked up on that legendary DeMent introspection over the last 16 years, indeed one of the 12 tracks is titled *Livin' On The Inside*. Home, family and religion have always been prominent in DeMent's songwriting and, as song titles like *Go On Ahead And Go Home*, *The Kingdom Has Already Come*, the title track, *Makin' My Way Back Home* and *Mama Was Always Telling Her Truth* suggest, they loom large on this album, with her father, mother and siblings making frequent appearances. Maybe I have *Ode To Billie Joe* on my mind, but *The Night I Learned How Not to Pray*, about the accidental death of a brother over 40 years ago, is eerily, and, I can only imagine, deliberately similar. It has to be said that DeMent takes a little work, much as I love listening to her, I would not claim that enunciation is her strong suit. In fact, rather cruelly, the Arkansas native reminds me of a film director, Alfred Hitchcock if memory serves, admonishing a Southern-born actress to "take the boll weevils out of your mouth." Even so, it's wonderful to have her back in full force, on a comeback produced by Bo Ramsey & Richard Bennett and featuring Al Perkins and Reese Wynans, and I can only admire the fact that she makes no attempt to disguise the fact that she's now over 50, but then she doesn't have to fight it, country radio isn't going to support this anymore than it did **Infamous Angel** back in the day. JC

BILLY BRATCHER • In The Lobby

(Cow Island ****.5)

Unless I'm totally screwed up about 3CM's demographic, I imagine most of you are familiar with the name of Cow Island. Equally, unless I totally misjudge y'all, many of you will, from scrupulously reading the credits of their six Cow Island albums, recognize the name of Billy Bratcher, the bass slapping songwriter of The Starline Rhythm Boys. So you may think you have a fair idea of what to expect, right? Not so fast, my young friends. Turns out that, left to his own devices, Bratcher is kin to Austin's Pops Bayliss and Mark Rubin, inspired by his great-grandmother, who played piano for stage shows and silent movies. An acknowledged Leon Redbone fan—no less than half of the 18 tracks, including Jimmie Rodgers' **TB Blues**, Irving Berlin's **My Walking Stick** and Albert Brumley's **If We Never Meet Again (This Side Of Heaven)** were on 70s/80s Redbone albums—Bratcher also draws on Sidney Bechet, Jelly Roll Morton, Tommy Dorsey, Steve Goodman and Roy Bookbinder. With a large, seriously syncopated Vaudeville/Ragtime supporting ensemble, saxes, clarinet, violins, viola, cello, valve trombone, piano, tuba, string bass, Hawaiian steel, dobros, jug, Jews harp, banjo, bones, cornet and trumpet, I have to say that Bratcher is much easier on the ear than Redbone, one of those people I kind of admired but never really liked all that much. Standout tracks are the salacious *The Sweeper And The Debutante* by the somewhat obscure George Gritzbach, of Falmouth, MA, and The Mississippi Sheiks' abrasive *He Calls That Religion*, but Bratcher breathes new life into a whole slew of songs that started life on your great-grandparent's Victrola. JC

CAROLINE & THE RAMBLERS • Red Hot Mama

(Rockabilly Girl ****.5)

Caroline Engel has been a fixture in the Atlanta 'Redneck Underground' and rockabilly scene for 20 years, but much of her career was spent covering other singers, Patsy Cline and Brenda Lee with *Trail Of Tears*, Wanda Jackson, Janis Martin, Gene Vincent and obscure rockabilly with The Ramblers, originals creeping in when she added the 'Caroline &'. Her debut comes in about 50-50, her eight songs being anchored by a gender reverse of Claude Demetrius' *Mean Woman Blues*, *Since You've Been Gone* by James Kelly, a contributor to the Atlanta Retro website, Gene Vincent's *Baby Blue*, two songs by guitarist Chad Proctor, Johnny & Dorsey Burnette's *Waitin' In School* and Ike Turner's *You've Got To Lose*. Voted 2009's Best Female Vocalist by Atlanta's *Creative Loafing*, Engel has a big, full, atmospheric voice, to be honest, rather smoother than one expects in a rockabilly singer, with that much power, she doesn't have to exert herself, so while her vocals don't have rockabilly's usual sense of urgency, she stands out from the Wanda/Janis wannabes. JC

ROSIE FLORES • Working Girl's Guitar

(Bloodshot *****)

Flores anticipated that I might take a liking to her 11th album—"I play all the guitar parts!" For a fact, one thing that's niggled me about her output, excluding the solo acoustic **Single Rose** (Durango Rose, 2004), is that from her eponymous debut (Reprise, 1987) to **Girl Of The Century** (Bloodshot, 2009), she's consistently roped in other guitar players, which I've simply never understood. As a general thing, you know why, for instance, Duane Jarvis, Greg Leisz or Albert Lee are listed in the credits, these are the kind of guys you call if you want a hot picker and the budget will stretch, but Flores never needed a hot picker because she is a hot picker. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that she's a hotter pricker than any of the surplus players she's featured on her albums. OK, maybe not Albert Lee, but I flat out prefer her style to, say, those of Jarvis and Leisz. However, while I've seen albums that specify who plays which solos, up to now you'd have had no idea whether you were listening to Ms Flores or one of her hired guns, but, with a title track written by Austin musician Ritchie Mintz about a vintage guitar he bought from Flores ("I didn't write it, the guitar did"), Flores unleashes her electric (James Trussart DeLuxe SteelTopCaster) and acoustic (A&L Ami Wild Cherry) guitars to what should be ear-opening effect. Started in Minneapolis, with Noah Levy drums and Tommy Vee bass (both currently with Brian Setzer), and finished in Austin with Greg Leisz pedal steel, T Jarrod Bonta "old German grand piano" and jazzman Red Young B3, the nine tracks hark back to 1956 for both Janis Martin's first single, *Drugstore Rock & Roll*, and Elvis' smash hit *Too Much* and the late 50s for Bobby Vee's *Love Must Have Passed Me By*, featuring backing vocals by none other than Robert Velline himself (he's Tommy Vee's dad). Other covers are of Lavelle White's *If I Could Be With You* and George Harrison's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, which I've never cared for, plus three originals, of which the obvious standout is the instrumental *Surf Demon #5*, though every track illustrates her virtuosity on the guitar. Coming off from midwifing Janis Martin's **The Blanco Sessions**, Flores provides the clearest demonstration yet that Reprise really dropped the ball 25 years ago. JC

LEYLA FENCES • Itty Bitty Twang Twang

(self ****.5)

Fences, a Dallas-based honky tonker, immediately reminds me of Houston's Miss Leslie. The two women share three qualities, one is that they don't have generic, auto-tuned voices. Once you've heard Fences' distinctive nasal twang, you'll immediately recognize it again and not be going, 'now which country bimbo is that?' Another is that, while I have no idea how old she is, if she hasn't really been round the block a few times, she certainly sounds like she knows what she's talking about when she sings about, say, a married ex-boyfriend who comes nosing around (*Get The Truck Out Of Here*). Finally, both women decided to write their own country songs because they couldn't relate to what they were hearing on the radio and, in 14 originals Fences runs an emotional gamut, though with a Loretta Lynn style sense of feminist humor, notably *Trophy Wife*, alongside the hopeful ups and bitter downs as she acknowledges her strengths and weaknesses. Her **Liars, Cheats And Fools** was voted #3 Debut Album in the 2010 FAR & Away poll, but her songwriting has noticeably improved, to the point where one of the many standouts, *The Next Time*, is the kind of song you'd have thought went out of style after *Stand By Your Man*. I'm trying to think of some way of saying this in a complimentary, or at least tactful, way, but Fences exudes a kind of gritty realism that makes me want to call her music Trailer Park Country. And I mean that in the nicest way. JC

LIAM FITZGERALD & THE RAINIEROS • Last Call!

(self ****.5)

Having once changed planes at Sea-Tac, I have to take Hearth PR's word for it that "hardcore country taverns that you never hear about in the tourist brochures," where Fitzgerald and his honky tonky outfit cut their teeth, survive in Seattle. The Rainieros started out when two members of an alt rock band, Fitzgerald and bassman Tyler Johnson, started doing a opening country set, which they enjoyed so much that in 2006 they hived off and formed a full band. There seems to have been a fair bit of turnover since then, but the current lineup, rather confusingly, is a five piece, though there are only four of them on the album cover. Fitzgerald, from an Oregon ranching family, came to country late but has a flair for songwriting in the classic style, four of his ten originals given a Western Swing feel by added fiddle, the others straight ahead honky tonk, with a fairly successful attempt to make the recordings sound analog. I wouldn't say they were the greatest thing since sliced bread, but I do dearly love to hear a band so doggedly old school. The only thing that bothers me is that, while their website is a shambles, they're 'social networked' out the wazoo and I have to ask myself, is that the cowboy way? JC




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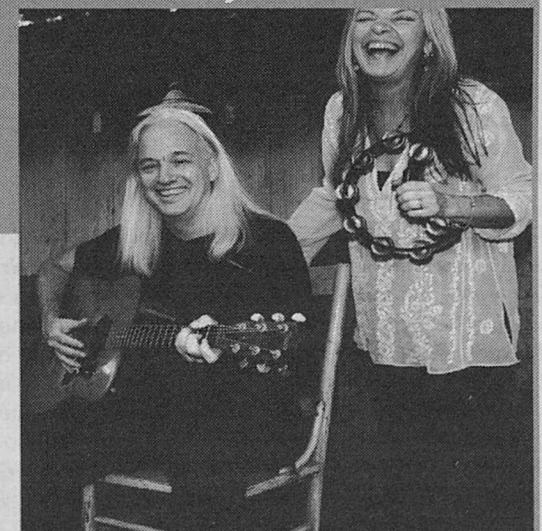
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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

So, all these years, I've been using fonts that are almost universally despised by professional typographers, mainly Wide Latin and Comic Sans MS. There are many competing and conflicting lists of fonts that are considered de trop in the industry, but these two seem to be on all of them. Anyway, one 3CM reader finally snapped, "The file attached to this message can be credited to the Department of Sticking One's Nose in Where It Doesn't Belong, With No Invitation to Do So. As you know, I have long been an avid reader of 3rd Coast Music. I have also been a typophile for some six decades, from my newspaper days in the 1950s, and I notice that your masthead could use a re-work. Thus I rashly offer the suggested attachment." OK, I'm not proud, and typography isn't exactly a field in which I have any expertise, so starting this month, a new look. I may tinker with it some more, but if I do, I'll first consult someone who actually knows about these things. Freddie Krc tells me that when he, John Inmon and Bob Livingston were backing Jerry Jeff Walker in 1984, they were **The Gonzo Survivors**. They didn't start calling themselves The Gonzo Compadres until the 1990s. One thing I had to cut from the review is that Fred, John and Bob have held up amazingly well considering they're almost 30 years older now. For sure, their memories are still pretty sharp, one thing they all remembered about the Dixie's Bar & Bus Stop gig was that they never got paid for it.

Were you so inclined, you could own a couple of dozen versions of *White Freightliner Blues*, by acts as varied as The Flatlanders and String Cheese Incident, Bela Fleck and Billy Joe Shaver, Gillian Welch and Jon Langford, but what they'd all have in common is that the song would be credited to **Townes Van Zandt**. However, this is not true of the version on Tim O'Brien & Darrell Scott's **We're Usually A Lot Better Than This** (see reviews), where it's credited to 'Townes and Will Van Zandt.' What the fuck? As he wasn't even born when his father first performed the song, it's hard to see where Will gets a writing credit. When you go to the ASCAP database, he's listed as the song's 'publisher/administrator,' but then so are Townes' other children, JT Van Zandt and Katie Belle Van Zandt, whom O'Brien & Scott didn't cut in on the deal. Maybe Will has got a reputation among musicians as the most litigious of the kids, or who the hell knows. I'll let you know if I can shed any light on this enigma.

I have some favorite political commentators, Juanita Jean at *The World's Most Dangerous Beauty Salon*, Steve Kornacki at plain ol' *Salon* and Chief Warrant Officer Jim Wright at *Stonekettle Station*, but this month I had to give a special prize to **Charles P. Pierce** at *Esquire.com*, who not only skewered Mitt Romney but did it in a piece that opened with a stanza from Lowell George's *Crazy Captain Gunboat Willie* from Little Feat's eponymous debut album, "Just then Luke the rat from down below/Called out to Gunboat Bill/He said 'Listen to those madmen wail/They've been at sea for ninety days/Without the sight of land/No, it doesn't look so good to me/No, it doesn't look so good at all.'" Even if you don't share Pierce's politics, you have to admire someone who can make a point with 40 year old lyrics from an album that sold about 25 copies.

As you may know, Google decided that **Innocence Of Muslims** (or whatever it's called) didn't violate its guidelines,

being anti-Islam but not anti-Muslim, so it's still up on YouTube. However, they ruled that **Grant Peeples'** video of *Nigger Lover*, from his latest album, is "hate speech," even though it isn't and, as far as we know, has caused no deaths or destruction. The video is now available on Vimeo, who, it seems, actually listen to the words of a song rather than have knee-jerk reactions.

You wouldn't think there was anyone in the English-speaking world or most of the non-English-speaking world who doesn't know how to spell **Elvis Presley**, but one morning a *Salon.com* headline read, "Lil Wayne breaks Elvis Pressley's *Billboard* Hits record." Turns out to be sorta kinda not really true. Dwayne Carter Jr has rapped on 109 *Billboard* Hot 100 charted singles, thus "beating" Presley's 108, but was the lead on only 42, a featured act on the other 67, including the 'record breaker' on which he was one of several guests of Game, whoever he is. Further muddying the waters, 31 Presley singles, including *Hound Dog/Don't Be Cruel*, the most successful double-sided hit of all time, predated *Billboard's* Hot 100, which launched in 1958, hence aren't included.

I have fond memories of a St Louis band called **Belle Starr**, that folded many years ago, but the band name has been revived by three Canadian women, a blonde, a brunette and a redhead. I got sent a cheesecake picture of the trio and even while I was thinking, 'Oh, Gawd, another manufactured country bimbo act,' I suddenly realized that I know and love one of them, in fact she's played several of my NotSXSWS shows and been featured on the cover of 3CM. The blonde is **Kendal Carson**, who took up with Chip Taylor when Carrie Rodriguez went solo. I have no idea who the other two women are, but seems Carson is a replacement, and I suspect she may have something to do with the fact that the trio is now covering Fred Eaglesmith rather than Dolly Parton.

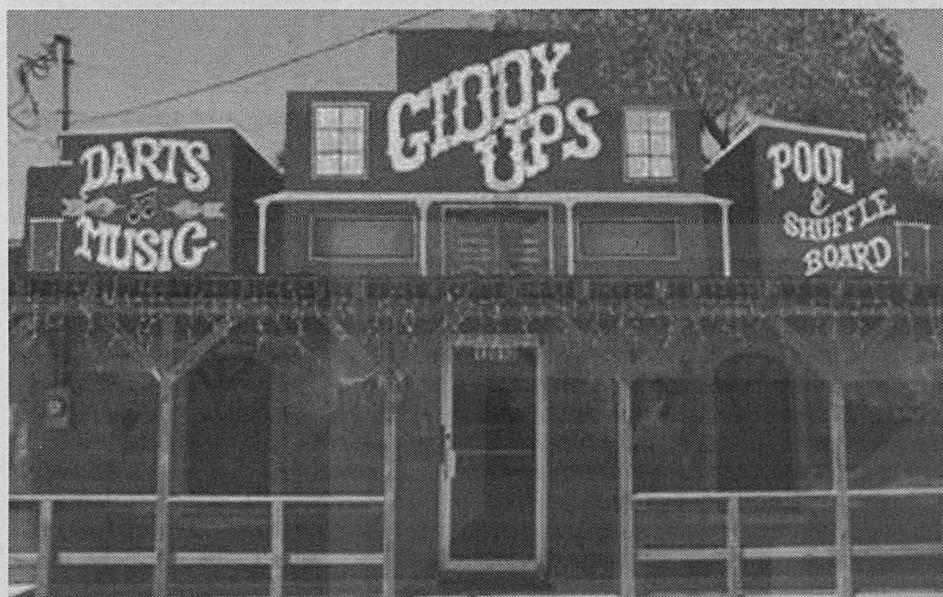
Thinking of Canadians, I got an email headlined "Tillers' Folly Wins Big!" Seems they're one of 70 acts, culled from a nominated list of more than 340, to vie for "the coveted Top Song in the Social Cause category in the prestigious 11th annual *Independent Music Awards* (The IMAs) Vox Pop Poll, the influential awards program voted online by more than 60,000 music fans from around the globe." Still trying to figure out where 'big' comes into this.

Have to admit to not paying any attention to AMA's doings for quite some time, but when I got an email from another music writer commenting on the overall weakness—"lackluster lineup. Embarrassing"—of this year's **Americana Music Association award winners**, I figured I ought at least know who had been up for and who had won those awards, and jeez, what a sorry shower. Apart from Hayes Carll, for Artist of the Year, there wasn't a single nomination for which I could, in good conscience, even if I were in good standing, have cast a vote. Is this just me? Not that I care if I'm out there on my own, and, in any case, at least one other person thought the awards were pretty lame, but, thanks to the magic of email, it was the work of a moment to run the nominees past a fair size group of people who would a) probably have heard the records and artists under consideration and b) would likely have definite opinions on their comparative merits. I refer, of course, to the Freeform American Roots DJs.

One wrinkle, I added a line—**None Of The Above**—to four categories (skipping Song and Instrumentalist of the Year). This option was the clear winner in each, overwhelmingly so in Emerging Artist. Only **This One's For Him**, which won AMA Album of the Year, came anywhere close, which I'm pretty sure had more to do with it being a Guy Clark tribute album than its iffy musical strength. Elsewhere, **Hayes Carll** did rather better with the FARsters than Gillian Welch, who won Artist of the Year, **Alabama Shakes**, who won Emerging Artist of the Year, got more support than any of their rivals from the FARsters, but that's not saying much. Where the DJs really diverged from the AMA voters was in Duo/Group of the Year, strongly preferring **Carolina Chocolate Drops** over actual award winners The Civil Wars. In fact, **The Civil Wars** had the distinction of being the only award winner singled out for specific criticism, "they make me throw up in my mouth a little" being representative.

Among other comments, Kim Rogers (*Good Stuff*, KVMR, Nevada City, CA) realized "what was niggling at me in the background. When I saw the list, it seemed like a Grammy list... of course we always figure the Grammy people don't know anything about our genre, because they continually appear not to by their nominees. However recently they have been closer than the AMA with this group of choices that makes one wonder what's going on when the organization that represents the genre is so off in their nominees." Meanwhile Dave Stratton (*Cutting Edge Countdown*, WQBR, Williamsport/State College, PA) wants to know what happened to the bands, "Has anyone else noticed that long standing bands in this genre (like Reckless Kelly) have been ignored, and solo artists and duos lionized?"

Last year, the AMA's Emerging Artist/Act was **Mumford & Sons**. I'm not going to review their second album, **Babel**, mainly because that would entail listening to it all the way through, and there are limits to the pain, suffering and too much fucking banjo I am willing to endure in the cause of 3CM. It completely baffles me that writers, who must, surely, know better, talk about the British quartet as if they had something, anything, to do with folk or country—or even music. I can understand that some people simply like the noise Mumford & Sons make (New Zealand blogger Simon Sweetman described them as having "all the skill—and much of the sound—of a lazy after-school lawn mowing service"), but it appalls me that anyone in the music press should take them seriously just because they're selling faster than Justin Beiber, but then nothing succeeds like success. Maybe it's something to do with the waistcoats. And they call me a curmudgeon. This is a review, on *savingcountrymusic.com*, by "The Triggeman" of an album by someone called Justin Moore, which makes me very glad that I don't get sent any Nashville product. **Outlaws Like Me** is the worst country music album I have ever heard, EVER. Worse than Taylor Swift, worse than Trace Adkins, even worse than Billy Ray Cyrus... I can't even believe this album exists. Literally, when listening to it, I had to double check to make sure the whole thing wasn't a joke. Without making any changes to the music, you could repackage this into a parody album, and it would fly. And not only fly, it would be a damn good one."



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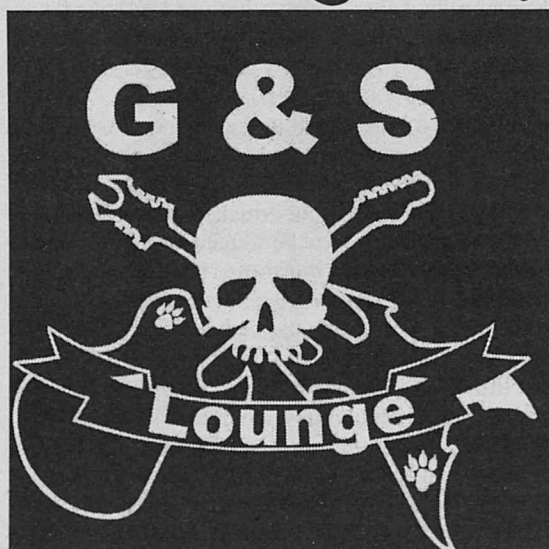
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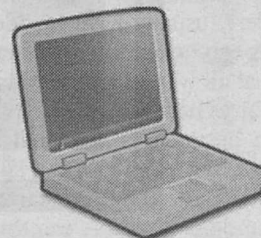
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REVIEWS CODE

***** Killer

***** What's not to like? ***** Can do better

** Why did they bother? * Piss on this noise

OCCUPATION: MUSICIAN

BCM gets printed in New Braunfels, a fact of zero interest to anyone but myself and the good people at the *Herald-Zeitung*, but does explain why the monthly distribution involves some six hours of driving, during which I listen to and make preliminary assessments of the latest CDs to hit the corporate mailbox. Last month, not for the first time, I found myself on I-35 asking far too many hapless albums, 'Why are you wasting my time, you fucking amateurs?,' and thanking God for Iris DeMent and Rosie Flores.

The distinction between professional and amateur can be murky, especially in Austin, TX, where—how shall I put this?—diversifying your sources of income can be rather vital. You might say that 'professional musician' is often more a state of mind than an entirely factual description, but for me the last word on the subject came from Jimmy LaFave, who once told me "You can't do this with a safety net."

By 'safety net,' of course, LaFave means having any qualification that would enable you to make a better living doing something else. The tacit corollary is, obviously, that between frustration and scraping by, at best, on the one hand and acquiring real world responsibilities, a significant other or alimony, children or child support, a mortgage or the need for a better credit rating, on the other, you will, inevitably, fall into the safety net. You can have a Day Job and play music, but if you can't tour, which role defines you?

Amateurs, of course, come from the entirely opposite direction, whatever it is they do for a living finances their music, "on the margin between work and leisure," as Robert Stebbins put it. 'Amateur' has developed negative connotations mainly because professionals feel a need to denigrate anyone who doesn't have formal training, but, as I'm sure you know, the word comes from the Latin for lover (amator). I know the many amateurs who send me their self-released albums love their art, but their main problem is that they have to be their own gatekeepers, trying, though all too often failing, to make objective assessments of their own talent. "Between the conception and the creation... Falls the Shadow," as TS Eliot warns us in *The Hollow Men*, essential reading, I may say, for any musician.

Though times have changed, the paradigm has shifted if you will, 'gatekeepers' still fall into two general categories, Before—record label A&R, artist managers and venue bookers—and After (aka too late)—radio, the music press and the record buying public. Rejection by the former may hurt, but it's a lot less expensive than rejection by the latter. Professional musicians, like professional gamblers, at least know the odds when they place their bets, amateur musicians, like amateur gamblers, usually have no idea quite how badly the deck is stacked against them. Many years ago, when vinyl, cassettes and CDs intersected, I commented that not making a record at all was an all too often overlooked alternative. That hasn't changed, even if the other choices have.

Still, the way things are going, the distinction between professional and amateur musician may soon seem hopelessly passé, a relic of a bygone era. When so many artists and acts have to self-release their albums, increasingly financed by Kickstarter campaigns, the line between those trying to make a living at it and those simply wanting to get their music out there becomes very blurry. When the best paid musicians are those miming behind stars and superstars, the only meaningful distinction between professionals and amateurs may not be whether or not they make any money but whether or not they can tour and if any venue in another town, state or country will book them.

JC

JAMES HAND MIGHTY LONESOME MAN

(Hillgrass Bluebilly *****)

Back in late 1997, when I had even less idea how to email a sound clip than I do now, actually I'm not even sure you could email sound clips back then, I was calling friends and playing them *I Heard Mama Callin'* over the telephone, and, I may say, knocking their socks off. This is not my normal practice by any means, but the rip your heart out quaver in James Hand's melancholy baritone and the lyrics of this track from *Shadows Where The Magic Was* (Crystal Clear, 1996) exemplified everything I looked for in a country singer and country song. Hand had played in country bands in the 70s, giving it up to become a more financially secure horse trainer, but a former colleague and fan of his singing and songwriting, veteran Fort Worth bandleader Tommy Alverson, took it upon himself to get Hand into a studio to record 14 of his sensational songs.

That might have been the end of it, one marvelous album by a long retired singer and songwriter that came out of nowhere, but, as he got back into the game, Hand's extraordinary talent inspired others to take up his cause. Country singer and songwriter Chris Wall put out *Evil Things* (Cold Spring, 2000) on his label, which, produced (sensationally) by Dave Biller and featuring Biller himself on electric and acoustic guitars and Jason Roberts fiddles, and including such amazing songs as *I Hope She Loves You (Enough To Tell A Lie)* and *In The Corner, At The Table, By The Jukebox*, earned one of the very few five flower ratings I've ever given out. Hand complains that the record was released with scratch vocals, but, like Doug Sahm's on *The Return Of Wayne Douglas*, I doubt anyone else noticed, they sounded just fine. As Roy Acuff said, "Whenever you decide that you're going to record a number, put everything you've got into it, because, especially a singer, don't say 'Oh, we'll take it over and do it again.' Because every time you go through it, you lose just a little something. So let's do it right the first time and to hell with the rest of it."

While Hand, who still dislikes it, and I may differ about *Evil Things*, it did attract the attention of Hightone Records, though Hand took another musician's not exactly unbiased advice and turned them down, a serious mistake in my view. Though far from abnormal among indie labels, Hightone's contracts looked and, to be honest, were draconian, but the payoff, Darrell Anderson's superb, much respected publicity operation, was exactly what Hand needed at that point in his career, or at any point, if it comes to that. Plus they'd have more than likely recorded some halfway decent product.

Next up, Joe Ables of The Saxon Pub, where Hand had had a long-standing residency, created a label and put out *Live At The Saxon Pub* (Knight Klub, 2003). A great set list and a band that included guitarist Pete Mitchell and steel guitarist Herb Steiner, but The Saxon Pub has certain limitations and the album had absolutely no high or low ends (tone controls made no difference, they just weren't there). Even so, as I said at the time, "Hand, despite the sonic limitations, demonstrates that, now that Don Walser has retired, he is simply without peer as a Real Country song stylist and songwriter."

Then, in a surprising development, Hand signed to Rounder, not a label one associates with hillbilly music (and I seriously doubt their contract was any more generous than Hightone's). This union lasted for two albums *The Truth Will Set You Free* (Rounder, 2006) and *Shadow On The Ground* (Rounder, 2009), both of which suffered from the same handicap that crippled Don Walser's albums, they were produced by Ray Benson. It's impossible to completely screw up a James Hand album, but these two were markedly inferior to *Shadows Where The Magic Was* and *Evil Things*.

Hand is no longer with Rounder, but, rather amazingly, he is back with a former business manager, Deb Perry, who also produced this album, and though a first timer, she throws heat like Nolan Ryan, and if anyone thinks you can record Cindy Cashdollar or Earl Poole Ball too hot, I would beg to differ. With Hand's regular guys, Will Indian lead guitar, Speedy Sparks electric bass and John McGlothlin drums, supplemented by Cashdollar lap steel/dobro, Ball piano, Alvin Crow, Beth Chrisman and Jess Meador fiddles, Bobby Flores fiddle/pedal steel and, from Woodsboss, ex-Weary Boys Cary Ozanian drums and Darren Sluyter upright bass, Hand reasserts the title he inherited from Don Walser by sounding like himself. Even though you won't see most of these musicians playing his shows, this is closer to how Hand sounds live than any of his previous albums—including the live one!

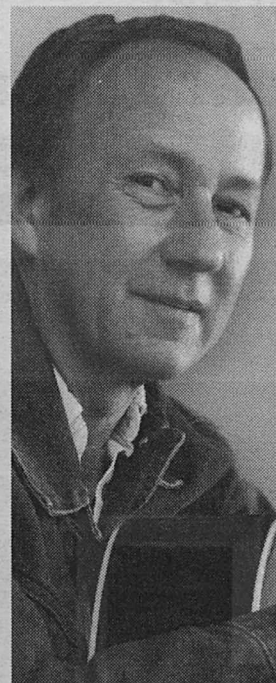
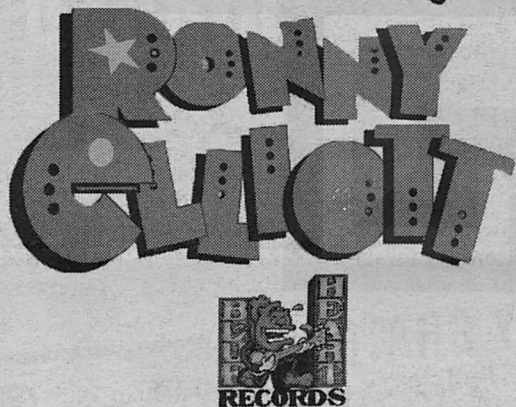
Thirteen new originals (plus a cover of Johnny Cash's *Get Rhythm*), Perry's fearless production and some stellar musicianship give Hand the chance to make up some lost ground. The 3CM/FAR world is fairly insulated from the music biz standard—you're as good as your last album—but we do need some fresh meat from time to time, and while we'll accept Choice (stick your Select), what Hand & Perry are offering is US Prime. JC



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*Reports to the Freeform American Roots (FAR) Chart

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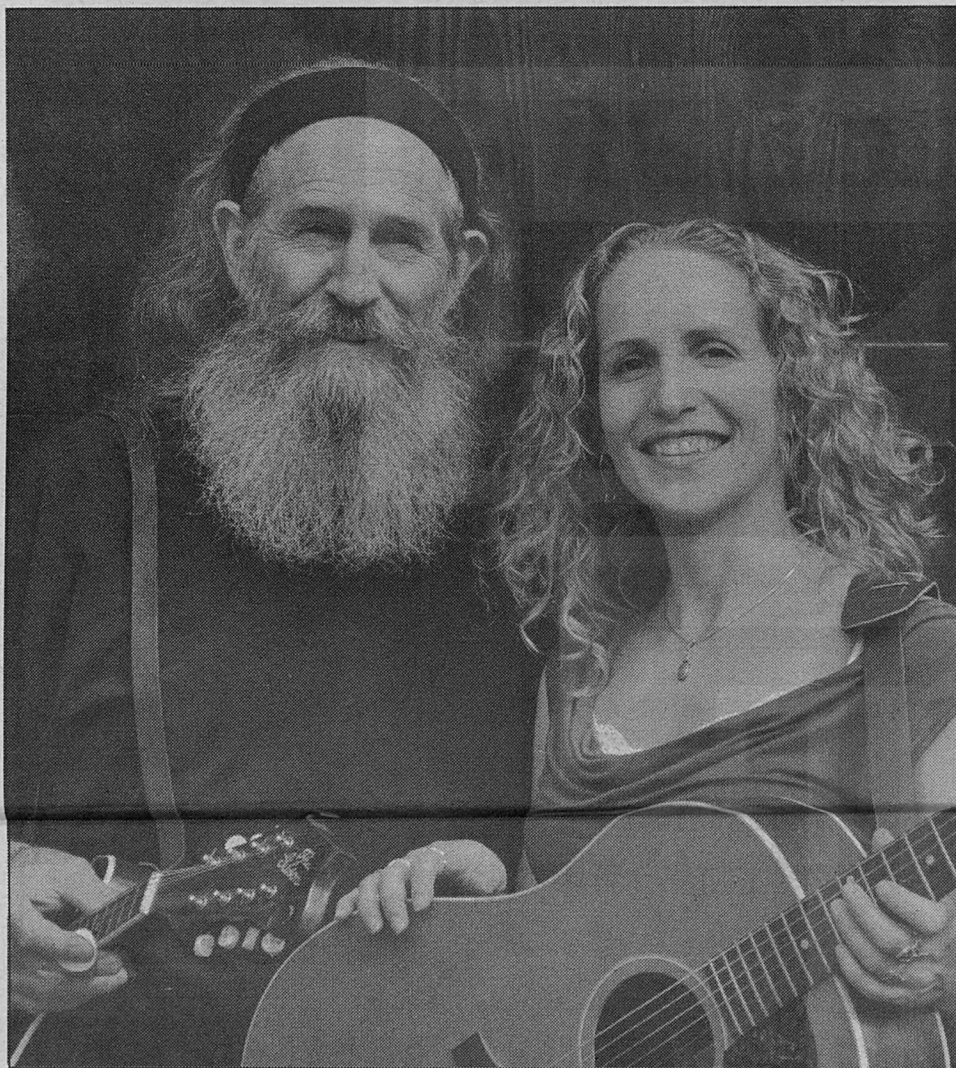
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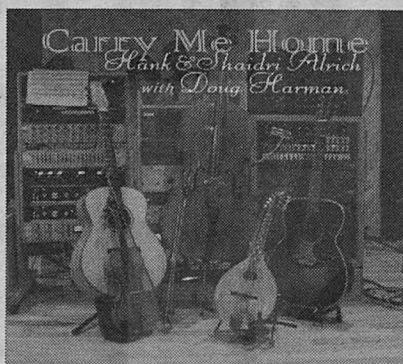
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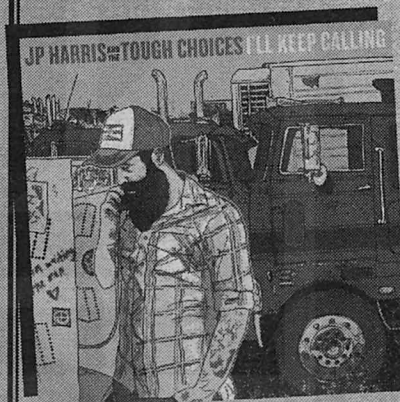
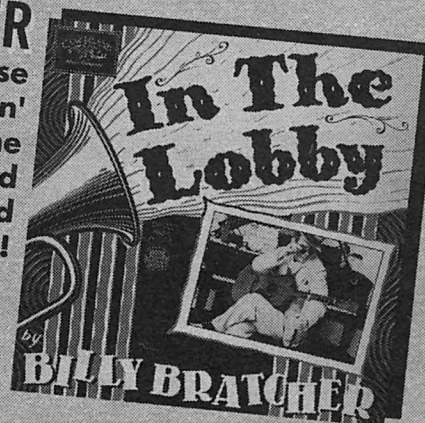
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Marc Savoy • 1941 Eunice, LA
- 2nd Leon Rausch • 1927 Springfield, MO
Kelly Willis • 1968 Lawton, OK
Gillian Welch • 1968 NYC, NY
Gene Autry † 1998
- 3rd Eddie Cochran • 1938 Albert Lea, MN
Chris Gaffney • 1950 Vienna, Austria
Woody Guthrie † 1967
Victoria Spivey † 1976
- 4th Leroy Van Dyke • 1929 Spring Fork, MO
Larry Collins • 1944 Tulsa, OK
Barbara K • 1957 Wausau, WI
Janis Joplin † 1970
Danny Gatton † 1994
- 5th Billy Lee Riley • 1933 Pocahontas, AR
Johnny Duncan • 1938 Dublin, TX
Belton Richard • 1939 Rayne, LA
- 6th Groovy Joe Poovey † 1998
- 7th Uncle Dave Macon • 1870 Smart Station, TN
Dale Watson • 1962 Birmingham, AL
Smiley Lewis † 1966
Johnny Kidd † 1966
- 8th Pete Drake • 1933 Augusta, GA
Larry Lange • 1950 Hot Springs, AR
Sonny Fisher † 2005
- 9th Goebel Reeves • 1899 Sherman, TX
Ponty Bone • 1939 Dallas, TX
Sister Rosetta Tharpe † 1973
- 10th Ivory Joe Hunter • 1914 Kirbyville, TX
Tex Rubinowitz • 1944 Abilene, TX
John Prine • 1946 Maywood, IL
Tanya Tucker • 1958 Seminole, TX
Eleni Mandell • 1969 Sherman Oaks, CA
- 11th Gene Watson • 1943 Palestine, TX
Ray Bonneville • 1948 Ottawa, Canada
Jon Langford • 1957 Carleon, Wales
Rex Griffin † 1959
Tex Williams † 1985
- 12th Nathan Moore • 1970 Clifton Forge, VA
Gene Vincent † 1971
Eve Monsees • 1983 Houston, TX
- 13th Gabby Pahinui † 1980
- 14th Kenny Roberts • 1926 Lenoir City, TN
Bill Justis • 1927 Birmingham, AL
Melba Montgomery • 1938 Iron City, TN
- 15th Victoria Spivey • 1906 Houston, TX
Mickey Baker • 1925 Louisville, KY
Sid King • 1936 Denton, TX
Al Stricklin † 1986
- 16th Big Joe Williams • 1903 Crawford, MS
Stoney Cooper • 1918 Harmon, WV
Ella Mae Morse † 1999
- 17th Tennessee Ernie Ford † 1991
- 18th Lotte Lenya • 1898 Vienna, Austria
Chuck Berry • 1926 San Jose, CA
Laura Nyro • 1947 Bronx, NY
Julie London † 2000
- 19th Piano Red • 1911 Hampton, GA
Marie Adams • 1925 Linden, TX
Jeannie C Riley • 1945 Anson, TX
Son House † 1988
- 20th Stuart Hamblen • 1908 Kellyville, TX
Helen Hall • 1927 Navarro Co, TX
Wanda Jackson • 1937 Maud, OK
Amy Farris • 1968 Austin, TX

- 21st Merle Travis † 1983
Roy Nichols • 1932 Chandler, AZ
Andy Starr • 1932 Mill Creek, AR
Mel Street • 1933 Grundy, WV
Steve Cropper • 1941 Willow Springs, MO
Bill Black † 1965
Mel Street † 1978
- 22nd Peck Kelley • 1898 Houston, TX
Bobby Fuller • 1942 Baytown, TX
Dorothy Shay † 1978
- 23rd Speckled Red • 1892 Monroe, LA
Boozoo Chavis • 1930 Lake Charles, LA
Johnny Carroll • 1937 Cleburne, TX
Ellie Greenwich • 1940 Brooklyn, NY
Dwight Yoakam • 1956 Pikeville, KY
Maybelle Carter † 1978
- 24th Big Bopper • 1930 Sabine Pass, TX
Glen Glenn • 1934 Joplin, MO
- 25th Walter Hyatt • 1948 Spartanburg, SC
Johnny Lee Wills † 1984
Joaquin Murphy † 1999
- 26th Wes McGhee • 1948 Lutterworth, UK
- 27th Floyd Cramer • 1933 Samti, LA
Dallas Frazier • 1937 Spiro, OK
- 28th Bill Bollick • 1917 Hickory, NC
Hank Marvin • 1941 Newcastle, UK
Porter Wagoner † 2007
- 29th Albert Brumley • 1905 Spiro, OK
Lee Clayton • 1942 Russellville, AL
Duane Allman † 1971
Barbara Pittman † 2005
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